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REVIEW

SERUM DIAGNOSIS OF SYPHILIS BY PRECIPITATION. By R. L. Kahn. Baltimore: Williams and Wilkins Company; London: Baillière, Tindall and Cox. 1925. Pp. 237. 15s.

THIS monograph gives an account of the precipitation phenomenon in syphilis, and the development, standardisation, and clinical application of the author's test. As is well known, numerous precipitation tests have been proposed since Michaelis reported a precipitation reaction for syphilis one year after Wassermann, Neisser and Bruck published the Wassermann test. It is claimed that the high degree of specificity and sensitiveness of the author's test, combined with the simplicity of procedure, may not only render it a valuable method for the serum diagnosis of syphilis (the test is also applicable to the examination of cerebrospinal fluids), but also open up new channels of serological research.

The portions of the book dealing with governing principles and their application to the author's test are carefully considered and clearly stated. Full technical details describing the author's precipitation system are given with exemplary lucidity. The results obtained have been compared carefully with the Wassermann reactions in a large number of cases, and the evidence strongly supports the value of the test, which has been favourably reported on in this country by such careful observers as T. E. Osmond and D. McLean (*B.M.J.*, 1924, 1, 617). Details are also given of a quantitative procedure especially applicable to sera of patients undergoing antisyphilitic treatment indicating the relative number of syphilitic reacting substances in such sera.

The concluding part of the book deals with general considerations of some further investigations into the fundamental problems presented by these precipitation reactions. This portion is necessarily more speculative than definite. We note that the author states "the test could not be employed as a medium of research until its practical application was assured"—a point of view that will distress some laboratory workers!

The final two pages are devoted to the consideration of the problem of the correct interpretation by the clinician of positive serological reactions in syphilis. It is deeply to be regretted that the author has allowed so little space for such an important discussion. The statement that "unless we assume that it is possible to have active syphilis, and at the same time be in good health, and have healthy children, we are forced to agree with Wile that a positive serologic reaction does not necessarily mean the presence of active syphilis" raises matters of such importance

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as to necessitate adequate space and consideration being given, in view of the fact that it is common to observe cases of late syphilis, especially on the neurological side, who have never presented any signs or symptoms beyond a primary chancre, and whose children are apparently healthy. The author proceeds to quote a case of an untreated patient with a tertiary lesion of the forehead whose serum contained over 2,000 reacting units. The number of reacting units usually found in active secondary syphilis is between 80 and 200. "We thus have a condition in which the serum of a patient having a localised lesion contains many times the amount of 'reagin' contained in the serum of a patient having generalised syphilis." This commentary appears to have no regard for the pathological view that syphilis can be regarded as a localised condition for only a few hours after primary infection. It is much to be hoped that the author will study the morbid anatomy of syphilis as reported in the classical work of H. M. Turnbull (Medical Research Committee Reports, Series No. 47) before subsequent editions of his monograph are published.

Taken on the whole, the author has established the value of his test as an accurate, simple, and sensitive reaction in syphilis. His precipitation test has the great advantage of eliminating such a variable factor as complement, but whether the test fundamentally involves more difficult problems as to the significance of the fact that syphilitic sera are more readily precipitated than normal sera, and whether the Wassermann reaction may not essentially be a precipitation test, remains to be seen.

The book is well printed and adequately illustrated: the bibliography (with the exception of a few errors) is good, and the index satisfactory.

We can confidently recommend this monograph to all laboratory workers and syphilologists.

A. D.